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From the Air Force to Ice Cream: One Year Later

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From The Air Force To Ice Cream: One Year Later

by Anne Moore

Our Veterans' Voices series continues today with a follow-up to a story from our first season. Bobby Walker was involuntarily separated from the Air Force, and so he decided to pursue a dream and start a business. If you've been to an outdoor festival or fair in the Miami Valley this year, you may have seen the fruits of Bobby's labor. Army veteran, and Wright State University student, Anne Moore of Miamisburg has the story.

Veterans Voices last heard from Air Force veteran Bobby Walker one year ago as he was preparing to leave the military as a result of force shaping, an involuntary separation due to reorganization. At that time, Bobby was considering taking a chance and going full-time into his start-up business, Fronana, frozen treats made from bananas.

I was also involuntarily separated from the military, and I never had the chance to talk to anyone else who has been involuntarily separated, and I was curious to find out if Bobby had experienced similar feelings of no longer being useful.

"I felt sort of alone and not really abandoned, but a little bit abandoned, and mostly because I had spent my entire adult life preparing to be an officer in the military for a long time," says Bobby. "The military said I would be in for at least five years, so I mentally prepared myself for that. And then I got a letter that said, 'Nope, you got three months to get out.'"

I could relate. I was discharged involuntarily due to a medical reason. I broke my hip, they fixed it, and I thought, "Great, I'm back on the road," and then they said they were going to discharge me. I was young, and it was in the beginning and not expected. So I freaked out and I sold everything I owned when I turned twenty, I bought a tent, and took a rucksack, and moved to Europe.

"I can certainly relate to wanting to pivot and do something totally different," says Bobby. Shortly after his separation, Bobby participated in the Open Dayton business competition, which put 15 budding entrepreneurs through an accelerated course on how to start a business. As a result, Bobby opened the Fronana pop-up shop at 27 west 1st street in Dayton.

Bobby and I both took chances after our separation, but when I returned from Europe, I decided to play it safe by settling into a civilian government career. Bobby's future is still uncertain. Most startups fail, usually because the business doesn't grow. Bobby's challenge now is selling a frozen treat in the winter, but he's meeting this challenge, and growing his startup, by shipping pints of Fronana across the country.

"I always feel like moving to the next milestone, and maybe that's an Air Force thing," he says. "I don't know, I don't feel impressed with myself... yet."

Veterans Voices is produced in collaboration with the [Veteran and Military Center at Wright State University](#). Funding for this series comes from Ohio Humanities.